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Mexico Denies Nassar Ties To CIA, Car Thefts

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Mexico's former top security chief was neither involved in a stolen-car ring nor did he work for the Central Intelligence Agency, the Mexican attorney general's office has concluded.

In Washington, the U.S. attorney general is considering whether to prosecute Miguel Nassar Haro, who headed the Federal Security Directorate (DFS), for his part in a ring that stole more than \$8 million worth of cars from San Diego and Orange County dealers.

The Mexican attorney general's office also affirmed that it could not substantiate reports that Nassar was the CIA's prime source of information in Latin America.

William H. Kennedy, U.S. attorney in San Diego, has said Nassar's CIA ties have blocked prosecution of the Mexican official. The CIA has said it no longer has an interest in Nassar since he left his job last January.

He was replaced by José Antonio Zorrillo, former lieutenant governor of the state of Hidalgo and a man with no apparent experience in law enforcement.

Despite their government's findings about Nassar, political parties from both the Mexican left and right called for a thorough investigation into his part in both the auto theft operation and the CIA.

Gumersindo Magaña, head of the right-wing Mexican Democratic Party, said if the investigation found that Nassar worked with the CIA, he should be tried "for treason to our country."

Valentín Campa, a federal legislator and a member of the United Socialist Party of Mexico, noted that Nassar headed the DFS's White Brigade, an anti-terrorist group widely accused of unlawful behavior.

"The ex-chief of the White Brigade personally tortured political prisoners, and he bragged of patriotism when he attacked socialists or simply men with progressive ideas," said Campa, a longtime labor leader who was jailed for several years for leading strikes. "And now look where he is: at the orders of the CIA."

Because the DFS has police powers that overlap the jurisdictions of other law-enforcement agencies, it is both feared and hated in many quarters.

The organization's extracurricular activities sometimes have resulted in confrontations with other authorities.

In late 1979, DFS agent Jorge del Rio was arrested in Tijuana by Baja California state police for his involvement in a Tijuana garage specializing in dismantling stolen four-wheeled vehicles.

The agent was taken to state police headquarters and allowed to make one telephone call. Within minutes machine-gun-armed DFS agents surrounded the building and obtained the release of their colleague.

Baja California Gov. Roberto de la Madrid was reportedly so incensed that he flew to Mexico City and demanded the transfer of the local DFS chief, Jaime Alcalá, a close Nassar lieutenant.

Since that incident, other DFS agents were arrested for receiving stolen cars, and state police vowed that further confrontations would end in bloodshed.

Another confrontation involving Alcalá's men occurred on Jan. 8, 1981, during the investigation of the car theft ring headed by Gilberto Peraza-Mayen, which resulted in 28 indictments last summer.

According to an FBI affidavit, Joe Ortiz of the California Highway Patrol, working with Baja California state police, located several stolen cars at Peraza's residence in Tijuana. Peraza was taken into custody and surveillance was set up.

While police awaited the arrival of several other stolen cars, the affidavit says, "The state police were surprised by Aurelio Rojas, an assistant to DFS officers, and Jesús Durón.

"These individuals, utilizing a shotgun and a Swedish 9mm machine gun, forcibly secured Peraza's release from the surveillance agents."

The affidavit also says that "Jaime Alcalá, (former) head of the DFS in Tijuana, hid Peraza in the trunk of his car inside the DFS compound in Tijuana until Peraza was flown to Mexico City. Peraza stayed with DFS agents until his return to the United States with six DFS agents on Feb. 28, 1981."

Three years ago, a joint U.S.-Mexico crack-down on smugglers of aliens was announced in Tijuana. A Mexican task force of DFS agents, under the personal command of Nassar Haro and working closely with the U.S. Border Patrol, arrested 136 suspected smugglers in Tijuana in one weekend alone.

It was to be the start of a new era of cooperation; in fact, the anti-smuggling drive was a fiasco:

- Almost none of those arrested were major smugglers.

- Virtually all of the 136 arrested were released without charges; by February of 1980 only seven were still in custody.

- Many of the suspects simply bribed their way to freedom. One government source told *The San Diego Union* that smugglers paid DFS agents up to \$30,000 to obtain their release.

- Those suspects who were released became ready-made targets of DFS extortion.

- Even innocent businessmen were arrested, beaten and blackmailed. One taco vendor arrested and tortured by the DFS was beaten so severely that a DFS agent brought him to University Hospital. Four operations later, the victim was released. His \$154,000 bill was left unpaid.

The DFS was also believed responsible for the kidnapping in April of 1980 of Arizona businessman John Freeman, who was abducted from his resort home in Puerto Peñasco and held several days. He was later released unharmed.

During the investigation of Peraza's car-theft ring last year, the FBI informant who transported stolen cars from California to the interior of Mexico reported that DFS agents shot and killed a farmer outside the northern Mexican city of Monterrey. The farmer's truck was blocking the road when the caravan of stolen cars came upon him.

The informant reported other incidents of brutality by the DFS agents involved in the ring, including the beating of a man who attempted to get his car filled with gasoline before those driven by DFS agents were serviced.

The DFS apparently reacts harshly to encroachment by others. In January of 1980, three men were arrested in Ciudad Juárez and charged with stealing American cars.

Two of the suspects were identified as members of the Mexico City police force. The arrest ing officers: DFS agents.